

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

creating one or more clones of a first forum for user interaction, wherein the first forum is dedicated to a particular topic, and wherein each clone is an instance of the first forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum dedicated to the particular topic while limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum;

determining whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the first forum and a second user entering the first forum or already in the first forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum; [[and]]

[[if]] when an interactive relationship exists, determining whether an instance of the first forum is full;

when the instance of the first forum is full, determining whether a headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, the headroom being extra capacity reserved for use by users having an interactive relationship; and

when the headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone of the first forum based on the interactive relationship~~even if the clone in which the first user is placed would otherwise be deemed full.~~

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information from the first user entering the first forum indicating one or more other forums the first user has been in, wherein each other forum is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum;

receiving information from the second user indicating one or more forums the second user has been in, wherein each other forums the second user has been in is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum; and

determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user and the user both have been in the same second forum, the second forum being different from the first forum.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in, wherein each of the forums the first user has been in is dedicated to a respective topic;

receiving information associated with the second user indicating what clones of what forums the second user has been in, wherein each of the forums the second user has been in is dedicated to a respective topic; and

determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user and the second user both have been in the same clone of a second forum, the second forum being different from the first forum.

4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating a domain name of the first user's address;

receiving information associated with the second user indicating a domain name of the second user's address; and

determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user entering the first forum and the second user both have the same domain name.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating a country associated with the first user's address;

receiving information associated with the second user indicating a country associated with the second user's address; and

determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the country associated with the first user's address and the country associated with the second user's address is the same.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating a language in which the first user prefers to communicate;

receiving information associated with the second user indicating a language in which the second user prefers to communicate; and

determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user entering the first forum and the second user prefer to communicate in the same language.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving an indication from the first user entering the first forum or from the second user that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in a clone other than a clone containing a designated user with whom an interactive relationship exists.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in a clone with another user with whom an interactive relationship exists.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the user in the clone with another user with whom an interactive relationship exists and who most recently entered the first forum.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a maximum number.
12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a threshold number, except if an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and one or more other users; and
 - placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of users only if an interactive relationship exists between the first user and one or more of the other users in the clone or entering the clone.
13. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, further comprising:
 - receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in;
 - receiving information associated with each of the one or more other users indicating what clones of what forums each of the other users has been in; and
 - determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and another user if the first user and the other user both have been in the same clone of the same forum.
14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive forum maintained by a system of one or more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and reading messages from other users as they are submitted.
15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive virtual world maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars, each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the avatars in the virtual world.

16. (Currently Amended) A computer system comprising:

means for sending and receiving content to and from a network;

means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for creating one or more clones of a first forum for user interaction, wherein the first forum is dedicated to a particular topic, and wherein each clone is an instance of the first forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum dedicated to the particular topic while limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum; [[and]]

means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the first forum and a second user entering the first forum or already in the first forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum; [[, and,]]

[[if]] when an interactive relationship exists, means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether an instance of the first forum is full;

when the instance of the first forum is full, means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether a headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, the headroom being extra capacity reserved for use by users having an interactive relationship;
and

when the headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone of the first forum based on the interactive relationship even if the clone in which the first user is placed would otherwise be deemed full.

17. (Previously Presented) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:

means for receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating one or more other forums the first user has been in, wherein each other forum is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum;

means for receiving information associated with the second user indicating one or more forums the second user has been in, wherein each other forums the second user has been in is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum; and

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user and the second user both have been in the same second forum, the second forum being different from the first forum the user is entering.

18. (Previously Presented) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising
means for receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in, wherein each of the forums the first user has been in is dedicated to a respective topic;

means for receiving information associated with the second user indicating what clones of what forums the second user has been in, wherein each of the forums the second user has been in is dedicated to a respective topic; and

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user and the second user both have been in the same clone of a second forum, the second forum being different from the forum the user is entering.

19. (Previously Presented) The computer system of claim 16 further comprising:

means for receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating the domain name of the first user's address;

means for receiving information associated with the second user indicating the domain name of the second user's address; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user entering the first forum and the second user both have the same domain name.

20. (Previously Presented) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:

means for receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating a country associated with the first user's address;

means for receiving information associated with the second user indicating a country associated with the second user's address; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and second user if the first user entering the first forum and the second user both have addresses associated with the same country.

21. (Previously Presented) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:

means for receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating a language in which the first user prefers to communicate;

means for receiving information associated with the second user indicating a language in which the second user prefers to communicate; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user entering the first forum and the second user prefer to communicate in the same language.

22. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16, further comprising means for receiving an indication from the first user entering the first forum or from one or more other users that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and one or more other users.

23. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 22 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in a clone other than a clone containing a designated user with whom an interactive relationship exists.

24. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in a clone with another user with whom an interactive relationship exists.

25. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in the clone with another user with whom an interactive relationship exists and who most recently entered the first forum.

26. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16, further comprising means for limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a maximum number.

27. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16, further comprising:
means for limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a threshold number, except if an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and one or more other users; and

means for placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of users only if an interactive relationship exists between the first user and one or more of the other users in the clone or entering the clone.

28. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 27, further comprising:
means for receiving information associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in;

means for receiving information from the second user indicating what clones of what forums the second user has been in; and

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user if the first user and the second user both have been in the same clone of the same forum.

29. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive forum maintained by a system of one or more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and reading messages from other users as they are submitted.

30. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive virtual world maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars, each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the avatars in the virtual world.

31-34. (Cancelled)

35. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

creating a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

creating two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

receiving information associated with a first user entering the first world indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the first user has been in;

receiving information associated with a second user indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the second user has been in; [[and]]

determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first world and the second user, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an interaction with each other in the same clone of the same world prior to the first user entering the first world; [[and]]

[[if]] when an interactive relationship exists, determining whether an instance of the first forum is full;

when the instance of the first forum is full, determining whether a headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, the headroom being extra capacity reserved for use by users having an interactive relationship; and

when the headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, placing the first user entering the first world in a clone of the first world forum in a clone of the first forum based on the interactive relationship even if the clone in which the first user is placed would otherwise be deemed full.

36. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:

means for creating a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

means for creating two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

means for receiving information associated with a first user entering the first world indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the first user has been in;

means for receiving information associated with a second user indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the second user has been in; [[and]]

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first world and the second user, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an interaction with each other in the same clone of the same world prior to the first user entering the first world; [[and]]

means for determining whether an instance of the first forum is full, the determination being made when an interactive relationship is determined to exist;

means for determining whether a headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, the determination being made when the instance of the first forum is determined to be full, the headroom being extra capacity reserved for use by users having an interactive relationship; and

means for placing the first user entering the first world, ~~if an interactive relationship exists,~~ in a clone of the first world when the headroom of the instance of the first forum is determined to be full, the first user being placed in the clone of the first world based on the interactive relationship ~~even if the clone in which the first user is placed would otherwise be deemed full.~~

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1:

wherein the interactive relationship is a group membership relationship;

the method further comprising receiving an indication from the first user entering the forum or from one or more other users that a group membership relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and the one or more other users.

38. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 36:

wherein the interactive relationship is a group membership relationship;

the system further comprising means for receiving an indication from the first user entering the forum or from one or more other users that a group membership relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and the one or more other users.

39. (Currently Amended) A computer program product, embodied on a computer-readable storage medium, including instructions operable to cause data processing apparatus to:

create one or more clones of a first forum for user interaction, wherein the first forum is dedicated to a particular topic, and wherein each clone is an instance of the first forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum dedicated to the particular topic while limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum;

determine whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the first forum and a second user entering the first forum or already in the first forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum; [[and]]

[[if]] when an interactive relationship exists, determine whether an instance of the first forum is full;

when the instance of the first forum is full, determine whether a headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, the headroom being extra capacity reserved for use by users having an interactive relationship; and

when the headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, place the first user entering the first forum in a clone of the first forum based on the interactive relationship ~~even if the clone in which the first user is placed would otherwise be deemed full.~~

40. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:
creating one or more clones of a forum for user interaction, wherein each clone is an instance of the forum;
identifying a first user entering the forum as having a special designation;
selecting a clone of the forum in which the first user is to be placed;
[[if]] when the selected clone is full, determining whether the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation; [[,]] and
when the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation, if so, placing the first user entering the forum in the selected clone based on the special designation.

41. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein:
the first user entering the forum is identified as having a special designation if an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and a second user entering the forum or already in the forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum.

42. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, further comprising determining whether the selected clone is full based on one or more of the following criteria: the number of users in the selected clone, the level of activity of users in the selected clone, the message rate, the data transfer rate, and the frame update rate.

43. (Currently Amended) A computer system comprising:
means for sending and receiving content to and from a network;
means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for creating one or more clones of a forum for user interaction, wherein each clone is an instance of the forum;
means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for identifying a first user entering the forum as having a special designation;
means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for selecting a clone of the

forum in which the first user is to be placed; [[and]]

[[if]] when the selected clone is full, means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation; [[,]] and

when the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation, if so, means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for placing the first user entering the forum in the selected clone based on the special designation.

44. (Previously presented) The system of claim 43, wherein means for identifying the first user as having a special designation comprises means for determining whether an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and a second user entering the forum or already in the forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum.

45. (Previously presented) The system of claim 43, further comprising means for determining whether the selected clone is full based on one or more of the following criteria: the number of users in the selected clone, the level of activity of users in the selected clone, the message rate, the data transfer rate, and the frame update rate.

46. (Currently Amended) A computer program product, embodied on a computer-readable storage medium, including instructions operable to cause data processing apparatus to:

create one or more clones of a forum for user interaction, wherein each clone is an instance of the forum;

identify a first user entering the forum as having a special designation;

select a clone of the forum in which the first user is to be placed;

[[if]] when the selected clone is full, determine whether the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation; [[,]] and

when the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation, if so, place the first user entering the forum in the selected clone based on the special designation.

47. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

creating a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

creating two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

identifying a first user entering the first world as having a special designation;

selecting a clone of the first world in which the first user is to be placed;

[[if]] when the selected clone is full, determining whether the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation; [[,]] and

when the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation, if so, placing the first user entering the first world in the selected clone based on the special designation.

48. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:

means for creating a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

means for creating two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

means for identifying a first user entering the first world as having a special designation;

means for selecting a clone of the first world in which the first user is to be placed;

[[if]] when the selected clone is full, means for determining whether the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation; [[,]] and

when the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation, if so, means for placing the first user entering the first world in the selected clone based on the special designation.

49. (Currently Amended) A computer program product, embodied on a computer-readable storage medium, including instructions operable to cause data processing apparatus to:

create a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

create two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

identify a first user entering the first world as having a special designation;

select a clone of the first world in which the first user is to be placed;

[[if]] when the selected clone is full, determine whether the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation; [[,]] and

when the selected clone has extra capacity reserved for use by users having a special designation, if so, place the first user entering the first world in the selected clone based on the special designation.

50. (Currently Amended) A computer program product, embodied on a computer-readable storage medium, including instructions operable to cause data processing apparatus to:

create a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

create two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

receive information associated with a first user entering the first world indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the first user has been in;

receive information associated with a second user indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the second user has been in; and

determine that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first world and the second user, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an interaction with each other in the same clone of the same world prior to the first user entering the first world; [[and]]

[[if]] when an interactive relationship exists, determine whether an instance of the first forum is full;

when the instance of the first forum is full, determine whether a headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, the headroom being extra capacity reserved for use by users having an interactive relationship; and

when the headroom of the instance of the first forum is full, place the first user entering the first ~~world~~ forum in a clone of the first ~~world~~ forum based on the interactive relationship even if the clone in which the first user is placed would otherwise be deemed full.